

Message Text

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SUBJ: PRESIDENT LOPEZ IMPOSES NATIONWIDE STATE OF SIEGE

REF: BOGOTA 5412

1. PRESIDENT LOPEZ SURPRISED THE NATION DURING A TELEVISED SPEECH THE EVENING OF JUNE 26 BY ANNOUNCING THE EXTENSION OF A STATE OF SIEGE THROUGHOUT ALL OF COLOMBIA. ON JUNE 12 (SEE REF) A STATE OF SIEGE HAD BEEN PUT INTO FORCE IN THE DEPARTMENTS OF ANTIOQUIA, VALLE AND ATLANTICO.

2. LOPEZ SAID THAT THE GOC HAD PATIENTLY ANALYZED THE VARIOUS FACTORS WHICH HAD UPSET THE NATIONAL TRANQUILITY AND HAD CONCLUDED IN THE LIGHT OF APPROVAL BY THE STATE COUNCIL (GIVEN TWO WEEKS AGO) TO "USE THIS INSTRUMENT PROVIDED IN THE NATIONAL CONSTITUTION".

3. LOPEZ DESCRIBED THE PUBLIC ORDER SITUATION IN COLOMBIA AS ABNORMAL. HE SAID THAT WHILE THERE HAVE BEEN PERIODS OF UNREST BEFORE THE FREQUENCY OF DISORDERS AT THE PRESENT TIME IS HIGH, "STIMULATED BY INDIVIDUALS AND ORGANIZATIONS WHICH I DO NOT HESITATE TO CLASSIFY AS MAFIAS WHICH WE MUST COMBAT". HE SAID THAT HE WOULD NOT USE THE STATE OF SIEGE AS A POLITICAL TOOL TO

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QUIET THE GOVERNMENT'S OPPONENTS, BUT TO GUARANTEE PUBLIC TRAN-

QUILITY.

4. ALTHOUGH THE SPECIFIC REASONS FOR LOPEZ' DECISION ARE NOT CLEAR, HE WAS APPARENTLY MOTIVATED BY THE RECENT INCREASE IN THE NUMBER OF KIDNAPPINGS IN VARIOUS PARTS OF THE COUNTRY AND BY ACTIVITIES OF THE NATIONAL LIBERATION ARMY (ELN) IN THE SOUTHERN PART OF THE DEPARTMENT OF BOLIVAR, WHERE THEY OCCUPIED A TOWN, FOR THE SECOND TIME IN THE PAST FEW WEEKS, KILLING TWO SOLDIERS. THE ELN HAS ALSO ALLEGEDLY KILLED POLITICAL LEADERS IN OTHER SMALL COMMUNITIES IN THE AREA. COLOMBIAN ARMY UNITS HAVE FOUGHT WITH THE ELN DURING THE LAST SEVERAL DAYS. MINISTER OF GOVERNMENT CORNELIO REYES EARLIER JUNE 26 DENOUNCED PUBLIC OFFICIALS, PARTICULARLY OFFICIALS OF MUNICIPALITIES, FOR AIDING AND ABETTING VIOLENCE AND SUBVERSION. APPARENTLY HE WAS REFERRING TO A MEMBER OF THE CITY COUNCIL IN LA DORADA, CALDAS, WHO WAS INVOLVED IN DISTURBANCES THERE LAST WEEK (BOGOTA 5760). THE COUNCILMAN IS A MEMBER OF THE MAOIST-REVOLUTIONARY AND INDEPENDENT WORKERS MOVEMENT (MOIR).

5. IT SHOULD BE NOTED THAT A STATE OF SIEGE, IN THE COLOMBIAN CONTEXT, DOES NOT GREATLY AFFECT THE DAY TO DAY LIVES OF THE CITIZENRY. ITS MAJOR IMPACT IS TO MAKE CERTAIN CRIMES (ILLEGAL POSSESSION OF WEAPONS, KIDNAPPINGS AND OTHER OFFENSES USUALLY ASSOCIATED WITH GUERRILLA ACTIVITY) PUNISHABLE BY COURT MARTIAL. IN THE PAST TWO DECADES, COLOMBIA HAS BEEN UNDER STATE OF SIEGE MORE OFTEN THAN NOT. (THE MOST RECENT STATE OF SIEGE LASTED FROM EARLY 1971 TO DECEMBER 31, 1973.) DURING SUCH PERIODS MILITARY FORCES ARE NO MORE EVIDENT THAN USUAL. THEY DO, HOWEVER, RECEIVE CERTAIN BENEFITS OVER AND ABOVE THEIR USUAL SALARY AND RETIREMENT CREDITS.

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